

MINIMALIST VAN DWELLING



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Introduction

Living in a car or van can be a great way to spend the summer or step off the grid! It sounds like the start of a good movie! Adventure is something most of us could use more of in our lives. Living in a car or van can be a way to do something new, refreshing, and exciting.

Many people are doing all they can to cut costs. In many situations, living in a vehicle is less expensive than a house payment or apartment rental. Car camping, as some call it, can help reduce stress on the budget and also make it possible to enjoy the simple things in life.

Living in a car or van is a great way for a couple to learn more about each other! No more distractions of a normal home living relationship. What a great way to get to know each other! For long term relationships, living in a van can be a way to move into a deeper understanding of one another, and enrich the relationship.

Save money, get out of debt, travel, and step off the grid all at the same time!

This book will help you come up with creative, safe, resourceful ideas to help ensure that you have an enjoyable journey.

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Finding the Right Vehicle

Finding the right vehicle is important. The vehicle needs to be something you can work with and that you are comfortable in. Vans tend to work better than other vehicles. However, you can make something unique and useful from just about any car, truck, or vehicle.

One of the most important things to consider is how many people will be living in the vehicle. You can get by with less space if it just you or even one extra person. For a family, you will need considerably more space so that you aren't crowded. Small spaces can make tempers short!

Another important factor with the size of the vehicle are the amenities. Do you want all of the perks you can fit in there? Or do you want to make it very primitive with just the basics in place? You also need to think about where you will be going.

If you want to be secluded then you may need a vehicle with four-wheel drive, a high center, and a heavy duty suspension for rough terrain, based on the location you choose.

Diversify as much as you can when shopping for a vehicle. Look for cargo vans that were once used by commercial companies. Many commercial vans only have a drivers seat, leaving the back of the van open living space. Typically, they are less expensive.

An open van will have to be built in a manner that allows you to have lots of storage, such as shelves and cabinets. For example, instead of framing the bed directly on the floor between the wheel wells, frame the bed above them. This gives you access under the bed for additional storage space. If you need more

than one bed, place them strategically at each of the wheel wells for maximizing space.

Vans can often be found for sale at various sites, including social media, Craigslist, and eBay. Look around town, too, as you may see an older vehicle sitting in someone's yard that isn't being used. You never know what sort of deal you might be able to strike up with a neighbor.

Placing an advertisement that you are looking for a vehicle is another option. Try to be selective about who you buy from and what you purchase. For example, you want a vehicle that has a title. If not, be prepared for the process that you will have to go through in order to get a salvage or replacement title.

A high mileage vehicle is something that you may be able to get for a low cost. There are pros and cons to high mileage vehicles. If you plan to stay local then it might not be a bad choice. However, if you plan to travel you'll want a reliable vehicle.

The color of the vehicle can be important. Vehicles in dark colors absorb heat faster. White or other light colors will help you stay cooler. This can make a huge difference if you plan to spend a great deal of time in the vehicle during the spring and summer months.

How much do you want to pay? You can get a basic vehicle that has some interior issues for a very low price. If you want a completely decked out conversion vehicle that is ready to go, it is going to cost you significantly more. Many people keep the cost low by getting a vehicle that can easily be gutted and make it into their own design.

Paying in cash can sometimes help reduce the cost of a vehicle. Cash can give you bargaining power. Also, it never hurts to ask the seller if they will take less

money than they are asking.

Now its time to make a list of items that you want and those that you need. Separate them and prioritize them. As you have money to invest, continue to add items from your list into the vehicle.

Accessorizing

Your own personal needs have to be assessed before you move forward with accessorizing. Do you want to go bare bones or completely self contained living? Do you want only beds, seats for relaxing, and maybe a place to make easy meals? If so, that can be set up fairly easily.

Cooking can be set up outside of the vehicle. Options include stoves, grills, and even ovens that you can use at a campsite. Many areas have fire bans, so you don't want to be dependent on setting a fire. You'll need a safe and practical alternative. Many stoves, grills, and ovens, are small and don't take up much space. They can easily be stored when not in use.

Building shelves and cabinets can be a wonderful way to decorate and have room for your items. Home improvement stores have shelves ready to hang. Or purchase used shelving from second hand shops or garage sales. Even better, be creative!

Cabinets will require latches. Pesky animals have been known to go through vehicles looking for food. You don't want a raccoon or skunks slipping in and rummaging through your cabinets.

Cabinet latches are also a requirement so that they don't pop open during travel. Magnetic closures usually won't keep cabinets closed. There are several latching options available at any hardware store.

A receiver or trailer hitch is another consideration. A cargo carrier can then be attached to the vehicle. This is a great place for storing coolers, stoves, propane, etc. It will help you to maximize the room inside while still having a safe location for everything you need.

If you have a van, you may want to continue to access it through the side door. However, if a bed or other item needs to be placed against the door, the door can be welded shut and entrance to the vehicle would be from the driver or passenger side.

Household products in the vehicle, such as a TV or heating and cooling units, are options. Small generators are available to operate electrical items, including household appliances. Generators will take up about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the amount of space within a cargo carrier.

Many people don't want to have a generator due to the noise they make. However, newer models are very quiet. For about 1 gallon of fuel, the generator can operate for a period of 10 hours, so it is quite economical, also. That does vary some based on size.

Heating and cooling are also options. Look for a product on the market that is dual purpose for both heating and cooling. It only takes basic skills and tools to mount one in the back of a vehicle so that the area will stay warm or cool enough for comfort.

Caution: never run the vehicle for heat or air. There is the risk of carbon dioxide poisoning. Even if you have ventilation in place, carbon dioxide can still build up in the vehicle, potentially leading to unconsciousness and death.

Curtains can add some nice touches to the vehicle. It is a good idea to use a dark color so that you can close them and block out the sunlight. In a van, a rod can be installed with long curtains behind the driver's seat area. It should be long enough to go all the way across. This can give added privacy.

Depending on how rustic you want the vehicle to be, you may want to consider

different types of flooring. You can make it simple with rubber mats that are easy to clean. Or carpet if you want to have something soft under your feet.

If you select carpet, think about how you'll keep it clean. Using the generator to operate a small vacuum or carpet cleaner is an option. Linoleum is another option.

Carpet and linoleum require something secure underneath. Plywood or wafer board are options to consider. Attach with self tapping screws and then carpet or linoleum can be put in place.

Wooden slats along the walls and ceiling with self tapping screws is also a great method. This provides you with the chance to offer insulation for the winter months. Wiring can also be hidden behind it and then covered with paneling. The wooden slats offer a base to secure the screws for the paneling. You can put any color of decorative paneling you want or you can pick ¼ inch plywood and paint it any color you desire.

If you want to really decorate it, consider wallpaper. There are all types of designs out there to pick from. Remember, you will be living in it and seeing it all the time.

The miniaturization of the many items is vast. You can get a small vacuum, washer and dryer (and you thought you were going to be scrubbing the clothes in the river!), countertop dishwasher, and even a microwave. Appliances can fit in very small places and give you some of the comforts of home that you don't want to miss out on.

Need that morning coffee? You can get a device that makes a full pot - plugs right into the cigarette lighter on your vehicle! Keeping your food cold is important and you can't always count on being able to get to town to get ice. A

compact refrigerator and even compact freezer can be ideal.

Of course these appliances will significantly increase the cost invested in your vehicle. Still, if it is a long term living area you can add items that will enhance the value. You can benefit from them while you use it and also have improved selling power when you are finished with it.

Food must be properly stored, either in the refrigerator or in cabinets. The smell of food can attract animals. You also need to have a secure way to store trash. Be sure and collect and discard trash daily from your vehicle so that it won't smell.

If you plan to create a vehicle that will have running water for the sink, shower, or toilet, you will need a water tank. There are several options for water tanks. Water tanks take up several feet of space, so that is a consideration when planning the use of water.

Some tanks hold fresh water and some hold sewer water. A fresh water tank will offer you a spot to put a water pump. They operate with a 12 volt power resource. The pump allows the water system to have pressure. It will only operate when you turn on a faucet and the rest of the time it is idle, not continually using power.

Depending on the model you select, they can be either mounted inside the vehicle with the sub floor built over them or they can be mounted underneath the vehicle. It is a good idea to think about what you will use before you design the interior of the vehicle in case you need to make room for it.

An extra set of keys for everything inside of the vehicle as well as the lock on the vehicle should be well hidden outside of the vehicle. Make sure it isn't in a common location where it can easily be found. The keys should be secured with wire or other device so that they won't fall off when you move the vehicle.

Safety

Safety is a priority in living a van. Planning is important to ensure that the vehicle is safe at all times. Wiring will need to be installed properly, for instance. Routinely check safety issues to unsure unnecessary risks.

One of the most important safety features to have in place is at least one fire extinguisher. Make sure to mount it securely so that it can't roll around when you drive the vehicle. It needs to have a designated stop so that you always know where it is in an emergency.

Make sure you have at least one smoke detector and one carbon dioxide detector in the van. This will help to ensure you are alerted if there are any issues and alert you to get out of the vehicle quickly. The batteries in such devices should be changed every six months.

If you plan to have a stove, water heater, or appliances inside of the vehicle, they will need to be checked regularly. Review all of the cords for any damages. A vent in the roof of the vehicle is highly recommended. When you have such items in a confined space, there is the risk of fumes building quickly, therefore, a vent is a great safety feature.

Carry bear spray, pepper spray, and other items for protection. Bears CAN open locks so if they smell food, they can get in. They can also break glass if they are hungry and determined.

Unfortunately you also need to think of safety in terms of other people getting into the vehicle. Sturdy doors and quality locks are a must have. You should be able to lock the vehicle when you are inside so that no one can get in without your permission. You should also be able to securely lock it up when you

venture away from the vehicle.

Always have a well-stocked first aid kit. You'll need plenty of supplies for a variety of problems. It should include scissors, gauze, bandages, antiseptic ointment, over the counter pain medicine, and more.

If you plan to be roughing it for a long time away from town, you may want a survival kit. It has all of the basic items of a first aid kit, but also offers some advanced items, including a scalpel, and pain medicine for an abscess tooth. It should feature water purification tablets in the event you are out of water and need to purify lake or river water.

Have some medical supplies on hand in case you need them. This includes common ailments such as a headache or back pain. Eye drops, ear drops, sore throat medication, allergy pills, anti-rash cream, and anything else you can think of that you may need should be on hand.

If you take prescription medications, you certainly need to make sure you have enough for your time away. Store all medications in a dry location and away from the sunlight. A small lunchbox that is insulated can be a very good option.

A CB radio is a good idea if you will be in locations where you aren't going to have cell phone reception. This type of communication can help you to get assistance quickly. The more remote the area, the more important it is to have a CB radio in place.

Make sure the CB you obtain has the WX weather channel available. You'll want to be aware of any weather alerts or evacuations in the area. Weather updates and advisories will only be for your given location, as the signal will bounce off of towers in closest proximity to you.

Hand held CB radios can be carried with you when you are away from your vehicle, allowing you to get updates quickly. Getting alerts as soon as possible will allow you make the decision to find shelter where you are or to make the distance back to your vehicle for shelter.

Flares are a good idea because they can be seen from a long distance. If you can't communicate with your CB radio or the cell phone, flares can send a message quickly. This type of backup plan should only be used in the event of an emergency.

Consider adding screens to the windows, allowing you to open the windows for ventilation. Screens also reduce the risk of bugs and mosquitoes getting inside. A bug zapper is another option and can be placed outside to help reduce the volume of pests. Citronella candles, used outside of the vehicle may have some effect on the reduction of bugs.

For safety reasons, it's best to always make sure someone knows where you will be and when you will be returning. You may have limited resources to connect with them, but check in on a regular basis. Someone in your life should have a good idea of how to find you if you don't check in. This will help ensure that someone will come looking for you at a given point in time if you haven't been heard from.

If you have the vehicle insured, make sure the coverage will also include the contents of the vehicle. Take digital photos and keep them at a safe location, not in the vehicle, where you can access them should you have a theft, water damage, or you experience a fire.

Avoid using candles or lanterns in your vehicle, as they are dangerous. You can opt for some solar lights. Place the lights outside during the day to charge the batteries, then use them at night inside the vehicle. This is a great idea if you don't have electricity.

Flameless candles can also help create the atmosphere you want without risk. Flameless candles don't get hot and will continue to offer hours and hours of light when turned on. They are LED battery based, therefore they use very little energy.

Some flameless candles have timers on them. Will you be returning to the vehicle after dark? Just set the timers so that they will come on at a given time. The timer can also give others in the area the idea that someone is in the vehicle when it is empty. This can deter the risk of theft or other crimes.

Rotate your supplies so that nothing expires. When you buy new items, move other items forward and put those in the back. Have a maintenance calendar for the vehicle. Be sure to keep plenty of various size batteries on hand for small devices, such as flashlights.

Being organized is important when you so many items in a small space. Make sure items overhead are going to stay in place so that they don't fall on you when you walk by. Less is more in terms of what you have out in the open. By putting items upward instead of outward you will have more room.

Testing Your Vehicle

A vehicle that is in good working condition will make your life a lot easier. Identifying that it is in good working condition will also keep you safe. Anything you can plan for and identify beforehand will help decrease or eliminate frustrations and upset on your new adventure.

If you have installed anything that requires plumbing, such as a shower, toilet, or sink, they will need to be tested for leaks. The time to find out that you have a leak isn't when you are out at a camp sight! Try to identify all problems before leaving.

Be sure to test any electrical wiring for your appliances. You want to make sure appliances aren't getting too hot or at risk for overheating. Check for any short circuits. Also, check to make sure there isn't an electricity overload that will shut your power down or cause a fire hazard.

Test your smoke detector and carbon detector to make sure they are in working order and have fresh batteries. If you have any stoves or other cooking items, use them in the vehicle prior to leaving in order to make sure the ventilation system is properly set up. If you can cook in the vehicle without the detectors being set off, then that is a very good indicator that the vehicle is properly ventilated, and safe.

All vehicles have specific weight ratings measuring what they can carry on each axle. Avoid getting too much weight on one end of the vehicle; try to evenly distribute it as much as possible. During the building process, if you have a place close by that has a commercial scale for vehicles (grain elevator), take the vehicle there to be weighted at regular intervals. You'll want to weigh the front axles and the back axles separately. This helps you to see that the front and the rear are balanced.

Check the tires to make sure they have enough pressure and quality tread. Regularly check the air pressure in the tires. Also, be sure the spare tire has air in it and that you know how to change a flat tire.

Check the lighting system on the vehicle. Test the blinkers to make sure they work as they should. Do the headlights and the bright lights work on the vehicle like they should? All are of the brakes lights working?

When was the last time the oil was changed? Are the fluids full including antifreeze, transmission fluid, and windshield wiper fluid? All of this is important so that you aren't going to end up stranded with problems that you have to try to fix on the side of the road. You need the basics of the vehicle to operate well for you so that you can actually rely on the vehicle to get you to and from the intended destination.

It may sound silly, but make sure the gas gauge works! On older vehicles it may not. If it doesn't, write down the mileage each time you get gas and estimate on the low side how many miles you can safely travel before you need to fuel up again.

Does the speedometer work? If not, you will have a harder time obeying posted speed limit laws. It isn't enough to just be able to keep up with the flow of traffic! That isn't going to get you off the hook with a traffic ticket or speeding in a construction zone!

If you have a trailer hitch, ensure that it is secure and make sure the lights on the trailer are in working order. If you have items that are tied to the back or the top of the vehicle they need to be securely in place. When you stop along your route, double check them as they can work loose with the ride.

Keep some basic tools with you on site so that you can do minor repairs if you do run into snags along the way. Even if you test everything, you need be prepared for what could occur down the road. And don't forget insurance in case of a break-in or accident.

Selecting Your Location

Now that you have a vehicle, its time to select your location. Knowing your options is a good place to start. You may have ordinances locally that prevent you from putting a vehicle in place by the river. Other locations allow it but only for a set period of time.

Fishing isn't allowed in some locations, which can hinder your ability to catch food to eat. Others don't allow fires. There are areas that are far too crowded for someone that would like to have some seclusion.

Be sure to investigate any area you plan to stay in so that you don't get run off by local law enforcement for violating the laws. You don't want to get a fine or a court date for not paying attention to these established rules and laws.

If staying by a river, always park your vehicle above the highest water line for the river. Flash flooding can occur very rapidly and you need to make sure your vehicle will be out of harms way. Don't make the assumption that you will have the time to move it! Flooding can happen in the middle of the night when you are asleep. Remember the earlier reference to the importance of a weather radio.

Weather conditions certainly need to be a factor when considering a location. Some areas around the river can easily get into the triple digits in the summer months. Inside of the vehicle, it can be too hot and you don't want to rely on the generator all the time. Other locations are just too bitter cold for winter outdoor living, so you'll want to plan accordingly.

Find a location with temperatures that are moderate for the time of year you plan to be there. If you are going to be living in the vehicle for a period of time, then you'll need to look at the seasonal changes that could influence your decision.

You'll want to consider areas of high wind, hail, or tornado risks, not just extreme temperatures.

A dry, level spot will be important when parking your vehicle. Carry several blocks of wood or bricks to slide behind the front tires and in front of the back tires to help prevent the vehicle from slipping or rolling.

Conclusion

Living in van or other vehicle down isn't the best choice for everyone, but you won't know unless you give it a try! It could be something you plan to do for a few weeks, the summer, or for the long-term.

Everyone has their own ideas about how to be comfortable and the amenities to do so. You will have to take all of that into consideration to see what works for you on a personal level. You can always make modifications to the vehicle if you find that you have outgrown the services that it offers.

Don't be surprised if some of the best memories you have in your life are from this type of experience. It is a great chance to do something unique and even challenging. It can also allow you the opportunity to really appreciate the simple things in life once again.

Too often, many of us get wrapped up in technological devices, fancy clothes, and high dollar cars. Being comfortable, living simple, and having a small amount of overhead and upkeep can help reduce stress and give peace of mind. It will certainly allow you to sleep better at night and enjoy all that you have in your life to be thankful for!

Have fun! Be safe! Step off the grid...

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